

[Chuck Colson](#) has [a great piece](#) on [BreakPoint](#) about [PEPFAR](#) .

Clearly, PEPFAR has shown itself to be a spectacular success—so naturally, liberal policy makers decided they needed to fix it.

Representative Mike Pence (R-Ind.) puts it bluntly: The proposed changes would “transform the program into a mega-funding pool for organizations with an abortion promotion agenda.” The pro-abortion interests apparently have the elitist idea that the way to solve AIDS in Africa is have fewer Africans.

[CQ Weekly](#) also an article published in this week's edition about PEPFAR and the impending struggle surrounding its reauthorization. Because the article is available to online subscribers, a substantial portion of it is pasted below:

It's been a while since the Capitol has played host to a fervent protest over AIDS funding. But earlier this month, conservative members of Congress and big-name right-wing activists assembled on the terrace of the Cannon House Office Building to denounce a Democratic bill that would expand U.S. AIDS efforts abroad. As one activist on hand put it, the legislation was nothing less than “a plan to destroy the African people.”

Such is the new politics of congressional AIDS relief. Five years after President Bush won approval for his ambitious plan to increase U.S. aid for fighting the spread of AIDS in Africa and the rest of the developing world, the program stands as perhaps his most enduring foreign policy success. It also has been a rare point of bipartisan accord on foreign policy in Congress.

But after Bush kept his requested future funding for the program flat — at an average of \$6 billion annually — congressional Democrats dug in for a confrontation with the White House. Claiming to have science on their side, Democrats, led by the late House Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Lantos of California, have offered wide-reaching changes to the plan at the behest of family-planning groups, seeking, for example, to do away with requirements for spending on abstinence education and to allow work with prostitution groups. They also proposed to more than triple Bush's original funding request, to \$50 billion, over the next five years.

And in short order, Congress' consensus on the issue unspooled. Republicans attacked the Democrats' proposed changes, particularly for what its streamlined family-planning provisions, which they say could open the door to providing U.S. money for abortion providers overseas.

Such rhetoric drives home the risks inherent in the decision to trigger a partisan confrontation over AIDS funding now. It would have been simple enough, after all, to continue down the easy road: Extend a popular program in an election year, double its funding, hand out the credit and go home. But it's also true that Democrats are feeling restive on this issue; some, indeed, are spoiling for a fight, after a year of legislative initiatives largely thwarted by the White House and congressional Republicans.

The President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, known by its acronym PEPFAR, has provided \$18.8 billion to prevent HIV and treat AIDS overseas, while also disbursing funds to fight the spread of malaria and tuberculosis. The AIDS funds represent the biggest investment ever in fighting a single disease. Congress got on board shortly after Bush announced the plan in his 2003 State of the Union address. Lantos and Illinois Republican Henry J. Hyde, then chairman of the House International Relations Committee, forged a fragile compromise that satisfied public health advocates and anti-abortion constituencies alike.

The so-called Mexico City policy, which prohibits U.S. funding of overseas groups that promote or provide abortion, would not apply to the program: PEPFAR instead allows some money to go to family planning groups with long standing — on the condition that they spend it on HIV/AIDS services. In exchange for signing off on the family planning aid provisions, social conservatives got the law to designate one-third of the HIV prevention money for abstinence education, with an effort aimed at giving grants to faith-based groups. Smith wrote an additional provision that instituted the ban on funds and services for sex workers.

For international AIDS activists, the 2008 reauthorization of PEPFAR presented an ideal opportunity to loosen these restrictions — as did, of course, the Democratic majority in Congress. “The weight of the evidence and the weight of the field experience is by far in our favor,” said Jodi Jacobson, director of advocacy at the American Jewish World Service and one of the new plan's strongest backers.

Jennie Quick, governmental affairs manager at Population Services International, likewise contends that the political moment is ripe for the Lantos plan. “Some of the differences that we have are ideological, and that's not going to change,” she said of the partisan split. “The fact that the American people have put the Democrats in the majority in Congress is a sign that they want Democrats to move forward with their agenda.”

Armed with that conviction, congressional Democrats worked closely with advocacy and public-health communities in drafting the legislation to reauthorize PEPFAR. Gone were the abstinence set-aside and the prostitution pledge. In place of the delicate balancing act around the Mexico City policy, there is now a proposal to allow integration of family planning and HIV prevention services — the red flag that has triggered the impassioned outcry from anti-abortion legislators and activists. Rather than the \$30 billion the President requested for the next five years, they offered \$50 billion, which they pointed out would be needed, since AIDS patients must take their expensive drugs for their entire lifetimes. No one who started the program would ever really leave it.

The Lantos bill is now scheduled for a markup when Congress returns next week. The State Department has already weighed in with a four-page letter opposing the bill, in part on the grounds that the draft version “lacks a directive to ensure that Abstinence and Be Faithful programs continue.” The National Right to Life Committee sent its own letter, predicting that the bill would “turn what is a bipartisan program focused on combating HIV/AIDS into a massive taxpayer-financed funding stream for abortion providers and abortion-promoting organizations.”

The expanded funding proposal has also triggered some searching debate over the basic policy approaches PEPFAR takes. In its initial incarnation as an emergency plan, it focused on the direst needs: prevention spending, orphan care and — most of all — drugs. But public health and development groups argue that solving AIDS requires addressing key deficits in the developing world, among them inadequate supplies of clean water, food, health care workers and passable roads. What’s more, they say, the momentum from the plan’s first five years furnishes an ideal opportunity to expand its scope.

One thing’s certain: GOP opponents of the House bill aren’t dialing down their rhetoric — and they’ve vowed to fight tooth and nail.